

REMARKS

Many of Applicants' claims have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over WO 01/80680 in various combinations with JP 9-317, JP 7-171011 and DE 3006805. In studying this rejection, Applicants have referred to an English language counterpart of WO 01/80680 (EP 1,279,348) and have obtained a translation of DE 3006805. Copies of these documents are submitted herewith.

Applicants' claims, as amended, require that needling be performed with forked needles. There is neither teaching nor suggestion in the cited art of using forked needles to drag portions of fibers through holes formed in a carrier sheet during needling, leaving loops of the fibers extending from the holes on a second side of the carrier sheet, as claimed. Instead, to the extent that needle type is specified in the cited art, the needles used are crown barb needles (see, e.g., paragraph [0051] of EP 1,279,348). Crown barb needles, shown in the Appendix submitted herewith, have discrete barbs extending from their lateral sides. Applicants have found that these barbs, which grab and carry loop fibers through the carrier sheet, tear the edges of the pierced carrier sheet as they pass through.

The Examiner has not in fact alleged that forked needles (originally recited in claim 31 of the present application) are taught or suggested by the cited art. Instead, the Examiner apparently believes that this feature is simply a routine design choice. Applicants respectfully submit that this is not the case.

On the contrary, Applicants have found that the use of forked needles prevents the carrier sheet from tearing when pierced. Because the carrier sheet is punctured rather than torn, as shown in Figs. 2A and 2B of Applicants' specification, the carrier sheet is able to support the base of the loop structures after the needles have been retracted. As discussed at page 19, lines 5-13 of Applicants' specification, the loop structures stand proud of the underlying carrier sheet, available for engagement with a mating hook product, due at least in part to the vertical stiffness of the trunk of each loop formation, which is provided in part by the constriction of the carrier sheet, e.g., film material, about the hole. This vertical stiffness acts to resist permanent crushing or flattening of the loop structures, which can occur when the loop material is spooled or when

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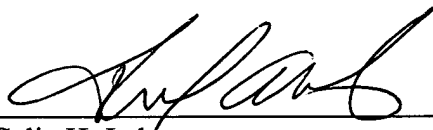
the finished product to which the loop material is later joined is compressed for packaging. Resiliency of the trunk, especially at its juncture with the base, enables loop structures that have been "toppled" by heavy crush loads to right themselves when the load is removed.

In view of the above, Applicants respectfully request that the rejections under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) be withdrawn.

A check for \$50.00 is enclosed for the excess claim fee. Please apply any other charges or credits to deposit account 06-1050, referencing Attorney Docket No. 05918-346001.

Respectfully submitted,

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